



The Insider

www.senate.michigan.gov/switalski

Inside State Politics with State Senator Mickey Switalski Senate District 10

January 8, 2010

Welcome to the electronic version of *The Insider*. I would like to take the opportunity to thank you for your support and giving me an opportunity to represent you in the Michigan Senate. It is my sincere hope that this bi-weekly e-newsletter will keep you informed of the happenings in Lansing while staying true to the traditional style of *The Insider*. If you would like to contact me, please feel free to e-mail me at senmswitalski@senate.michigan.gov or call me at my Roseville or Lansing office. You can also meet me in person during my constituent hours, coming to a location near you. Call my office and make an appointment or just walk in. See the schedule below for details.

Mickey's Blog: With X-mas Over, The Bills Come Due

Yesterday (January 7, 2010)

It's only the first week of the New Year, but there is already a lot happening in Michigan politics. The shocker of the week was the announcement by John Cherry, the current Lieutenant Governor, that he would not run for Governor this year. He was the leading candidate for the Democrats, but he cited money problems as the reason for withdrawing from the race.

Word on the street is that Cherry had raised \$1 million, but he had spent \$1.5 million. Campaign Finance Reports aren't due for another few weeks, so we won't know for sure until then. But spending that much, that early, was not a good sign. I am not a big fan of big staff and consultants in campaigns anyway. That was the lesson of John McCain's presidential campaign in 2008. He ran a front-runner campaign and ran out of money long before Iowa. The media pronounced him dead. He went back to his old way, on the cheap, and ended up winning the nomination.

I have great respect for Cherry. He has great experience, judgment, and knows how state government operates. His challenge was to get voters to see beyond his stout, balding, and somewhat gruff appearance to the quality person who is respected and admired among leaders on both sides of the aisle in Lansing.

In a wise editorial, (<http://www.macombdaily.com/articles/2010/01/07/opinion/srv0000007256087.txt>), the *Macomb Daily* said that Cherry left for all the wrong reasons. Their point was that good looks and the ability to raise money don't translate into effective leadership. So a good candidate will never face the voters because he or she didn't measure up on irrelevant criteria. That is one of the defects to politics as we practice it in the 21st century.

With Cherry gone, there has been a mad scramble among the Democrats, with undeclared candidates stepping forward, and others trying to recruit former Cherry supporters. For interested observers, among

whom I count myself, it is a good time to let things shake out, see who decides to run, and withhold judgment for now.

As the past week has shown, the ground can change quickly.

Today (January 8, 2010)

Today, David Bing will be sworn in as Mayor of Detroit for a full 4-year term. Bing and Robert Bobb, the emergency manager of the Detroit Public Schools, have made some tough decisions about reforming deficit-plagued operations. I wish them well, and try to support them. That's why I will attend the swearing-in at the Fox Theatre today.

The Mayor came to Lansing last month to meet, greet, and ask for support for some legislation the City wanted. Detroit has a bonded debt limit of \$125 million and wants the Michigan Legislature to raise the cap to \$250 million. This makes me uneasy. It is like someone saying, "Loan me some money so I can get out of debt." The very idea contradicts itself.

When I posed this question, the City Finance Director described Detroit's predicament. They already have to borrow short term notes, which exist outside the bond cap. They do that every year, and will continue to do it, and it is at a high interest rate. If we allow them to bond, they could get a lower interest rate and save money.

That makes sense, but only if the City can bring its spending in line with its revenues, and start paying off the debt instead of adding to it. Otherwise, I would only be enabling the City to continue operating at a level they can't sustain. Sometimes harsh medicine is needed to make an organization realize they have to make drastic changes and unpalatable reforms. Otherwise, employees and citizens think they can continue business as usual.

Detroit and Michigan are both in that situation. The trick in politics is to not make the medicine so drastic that you kill the patient.

Detroit will have to make a strong case, with a clear demonstration of its will to reform, in order to gain legislative support for its debt initiative.

Next Week

Monday, January 11, is my Birthday, perhaps someday a national holiday (in principle?). But more importantly, it is the day of the Consensus Revenue Estimating Conference in Lansing. The heads of the Michigan House and Senate Fiscal agencies sit with the State Treasurer and agree on the official estimate of how much money the state will take in from taxes next year. From this, they derive the surplus (I wish) or deficit for the state's next budget year, beginning on October 1, 2010. A new budget cycle will then start all over.

It appears that we will have a significant deficit again this year. We made lots of cuts to government last year, and there will have to be more this year. We will have to reorganize and change the way we do things. We will have to look at revenues. This will be my last state budget, and my goal is to leave my successors with a sustainable foundation.

It won't be easy. But I was elected to make the tough decisions. Stay tuned.

Mickey's Ends and Notes

'RACE TO THE TOP' LEGISLATION SIGNED INTO LAW

Governor Granholm recently signed a five-bill legislative package that reforms Michigan's educational system and allows the state to compete for up to \$400 million in federal Recovery Act funds through President Obama's Race to the Top initiative. The state is finalizing its Race to the Top application, which is due to the United States Department of Education by January 19.

The education reforms, which passed the Michigan Legislature in December:

- Allows the state to intervene in the lowest-performing schools;
- Permits new high-quality charter schools to open if they meet certain standards, and permit the closure of low-performing charter schools;
- Requires administrators to be certified;
- Requires an annual evaluation of teachers and administrators using data on student growth;
- Creates alternative routes to teacher certification to help bring the best and brightest into our classrooms; and
- Raises the dropout age from 16 to 18, beginning for the high school class of 2016.

MACOMB COUNTY HABITAT FOR HUMANITY LOOKING FOR VOLUNTEERS

The Macomb County Habitat for Humanity is looking for volunteers as well as donations to help in their efforts to build and rebuild homes in partnership with local families in need.

Over the next few years, the Macomb Habitat will be building fewer houses but rehabbing more, including foreclosed and empty homes to help stabilize neighborhoods within Macomb County. In 2010, the Macomb Habitat plans on building and rehabbing approximately 18-20 properties.

Through volunteer and contract labor, Macomb County Habitat for Humanity (MCHFH) builds or rehabilitates homes in Macomb County for low to medium income families. It works with local communities to re-sell completed homes at Zero Interest to Partner Families. Homeowners put in 250 hours of sweat equity building their own house or on other MCHFH projects and also pay a monthly mortgage payment to Habitat with the money used to build and/or rehab additional homes.

Volunteers are needed to assist at project sites, the office, or the ReStore, with build days scheduled for Wednesday and Saturday. Cash, material, and food donations to help feed volunteers are also welcome. To learn more or to become a volunteer or donor, please contact (586) 263-1540 or go to their website at <http://www.macombhabitat.org>.

DEQ AND EPA TEAM UP TO ENCOURAGE RESIDENTS TO TEST HOMES FOR RADON

January is National Radon Action Month, and the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are teaming up with local health departments to encourage Michigan residents to test their homes for radon, a tasteless, odorless, colorless, and radioactive gas.

The Macomb County Health Department, which can be contacted at (586) 469-5235 or by their website (<http://www.macombcountymi.gov/publichealth/index.htm>), offers free radon test kits for county residents. Low-cost radon test kits can also be obtained online at <http://mi.radon.com>.

Radon is a serious health concern. Radon is considered to be the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States and is estimated to result in more than 21,000 lung cancer deaths in the United States. It is also the leading cause of lung cancer among nonsmokers. According to the Macomb County Health

Department, approximately 5-10 percent of homes in the county have elevated radon levels. For more information on radon, log on to the following link: http://www.michigan.gov/deq/0,1607,7-135-3310_4105_4196---,00.html.

WEBSITE GIVES PARENTS INFORMATION ON TOXIC TOYS

The nonprofit Ecology Center in Ann Arbor has released its third annual Consumer Guide to Toxic Chemicals in Toys last month. The guide can be found at www.healthystuff.org and is compiled from the testing of approximately 700 popular toys during the past year. Toys were tested for harmful levels of lead, cadmium, arsenic, mercury and other chemicals.

MDCH WARNS RESIDENTS TO AVOID E-MAIL SCAM ON H1N1 VACCINE

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Office of the Chief Information Security Officer (OCISO) Cyber Security Incident Response Team (CSIRT) have received reports of fraudulent e-mails referencing a CDC-sponsored State Vaccination Program for the H1N1 virus. The messages request that users create a personal H1N1 "Vaccination Profile" on the cdc.gov Web site. The messages then states that anyone who has reached the age of 18 has to have his/her personal "Vaccination Profile" on the cdc.gov site.

Readers should note that the CDC has NOT implemented a state vaccination program requiring registration on www.cdc.gov and e-mails claiming this are a scam. Residents are asked to ignore and delete such e-mails.

Users that click on the embedded link in the e-mail are at risk of having a malicious code installed on their computer system. Internet users are encouraged to take the following steps to reduce the risk of being a victim of a phishing attack:

- Do not follow unsolicited links and do not open or respond to unsolicited email messages.
- Use caution when visiting untrusted Web sites.
- Use caution when entering personal information online.

For more information, please visit www.cdc.gov/hoaxes_rumors.html.

BEWARE OF FURNACE CLEANING SCAMS WHILE WINTERIZING YOUR HOME HEATING SYSTEM

This is the time of year to get your furnace cleaned and ready for winter. The Michigan Department of Energy, Labor & Economic Growth (DELEG) offers some sensible tips so that you do not fall victim to potential scams. In the past, the DELEG Bureau of Construction Codes has been involved in cases where elderly residents have been scammed out of as much as \$30,000 in unnecessary heating and cooling repairs and equipment purchases. These situations can be avoided by knowing how to recognize questionable and potentially fraudulent contractors. The do's and don'ts are:

*Do maintain your furnace by cleaning air returns with a household vacuum cleaner and checking the filter once a month and replacing it if necessary. This will maintain efficiency and prolong the life of the furnace.

*Do get your heating system thoroughly cleaned by a reputable, licensed, local mechanical contractor a minimum of every two years.

*Do get at least three independent written estimates from licensed local mechanical contractors if a furnace repair or replacement is recommended. If you subsequently sign a contract for work, make sure it stipulates that final payment is not due until the mandatory inspection by the mechanical code enforcing agency is approved.

*Do ask to see the mechanical contractor's license and write down the contractor and license number listed on it.

*Do verify that the license is valid and issued for the proper classifications for the work he or she will be conducting for you. You can check this information by visiting the Bureau's website at <http://www.michigan.gov/bcclicense> or by calling the Bureau's Mechanical Division at (517) 241-9325.

*Don't fall for telephone solicitations that offer "low-cost" or "free" furnace cleaning. Once in the dwelling, the worker may tell the homeowners their heating system has serious problems that require immediate attention. Get a written description of the suggested work and seek a second opinion.

*Don't sign a contract just because the worker says you face possible illness or death if the furnace isn't replaced immediately. If told your furnace threatens your health, ask for a written copy of the technician's test results and call your local utility company.

*Don't hire someone who comes to your door with a Shop-Vac vacuum offering to clean your heating ducts. It will not do the job. A proper cleaning requires a high volume vacuum system and maybe even a steam process.

DTE ENERGY AND CONSUMERS ENERGY OFFER UTILITY BILL ASSISTANCE

Now that winter is here, it's important that we begin preparing ourselves and our houses for the colder weather. DTE Energy and Consumers Energy offer a number of programs to help customers with their energy bills.

Payment assistance programs offered to customers include: a medical emergencies program to postpone shutoffs in the event of a medical issue, and a shut-off protection plan to spread future bills out over the year and to include equal monthly payments on an unpaid balance in order to avoid a shut-off.

Some consumers and all senior citizens regardless of their income also qualify for DTE Energy's Winter Protection Plan. This program protects seniors and low-income customers from shutoffs between November 1 and March 31. During this period, customers must pay a portion of their estimated annual bill plus regular payments on any past-due bills. After March 31, the required bill payments will increase to cover winter bills. For more information on any of these programs, please call Consumers Energy at 800-477-5050 and DTE Energy at 800-477-4747.

Many assistance programs are available by calling 211 at United Way. Weatherization help is available for low-income residents. These programs help with caulking, weather stripping, and insulation. Another program that is available is THAW, the Heat and Warmth Fund, which helps people who are facing a shut-off and have exhausted all federal and state funding programs.

The state offers assistance with energy bills through the State Emergency Relief Program in the Department of Human Services. This program is available to DHS clients and non-DHS clients. For more information, call the Energy Assistance Hotline at 800-292-5650, or visit your local DHS office.

In addition, visit the following websites to learn more about help that is available:

DTE Energy:

<http://www.dteenergy.com/residentialCustomers/billingPayment/paymentPrograms/payAssistance.html>

Consumers Energy: <http://www.consumersenergy.com/welcome.htm>

United Way of Southeastern Michigan: www.uwsem.org

THAW, the Heat and Warmth Fund: http://www.thawfund.org/how_help/index.html

State Emergency Relief Energy Assistance Programs:

<http://www.michigan.gov/heatingassistance/0,1607,7-215-33211-105989--,00.html>

Office Hours

Here are my next scheduled coffee hours. Please feel to stop on by or make an appointment by calling my office.

January 25, 2010 1:30 – 2:30 p.m. Senator Switalski's District Office 31513 Gratiot, Suite B	
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Mickey's TV Insider Show

Check out my TV Insider Show coming to a television station near you. Watch me interview local guests about politics, life, issues and concerns to our district.

Sterling Heights

Every Saturday and Sunday at 1 p.m.
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Clinton Township

Last week of every month- Sat thru Thurs
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Utica

Every Wednesday at 9 a.m.
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Roseville

Various Times-check local listings
(Comcast Channel 18/WOW Channel 10)

Contact My Office

Website: <http://www.senate.michigan.gov/switalski>

Email: senmswitalski@senate.michigan.gov

Lansing Office

Senator Mickey Switalski
Senate District 10
410 Farnum
P.O. Box 30036
Lansing, Michigan 48909

(866) 303-0110 toll free
(517) 373-7315
Fax-(517) 373-3126

District Office

31513 Gratiot, Suite B
Roseville, MI 48066

Monday through Friday
9:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.

(586) 294-0925 phone
Fax- (586) 294-0985